

Comprehensive Statewide Wildland Fire Prevention, Preparedness & Suppression Policy

Report on Progress

to the

Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environmental Quality Interim Committee

18 November 2015

Senator Evan Vickers and

Brian Cottam, Director/State Forester

Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands



Introducing the Proposed Wildland Fire Policy

1. Brief Background
2. Policy Proposal Video
3. Senator Evan Vickers
4. Mark Ward, Utah Association of Counties
5. Cameron Diehl, Utah League of Cities & Towns
6. Chief Kevin Ward, Layton City Fire



Why a Wildfire Policy Change?

A large wildfire is burning at night, with bright orange and yellow flames rising high into the dark sky. Thick black smoke billows from the fire. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of several trees are visible against the intense light of the fire.

Executive & Legislative direction...

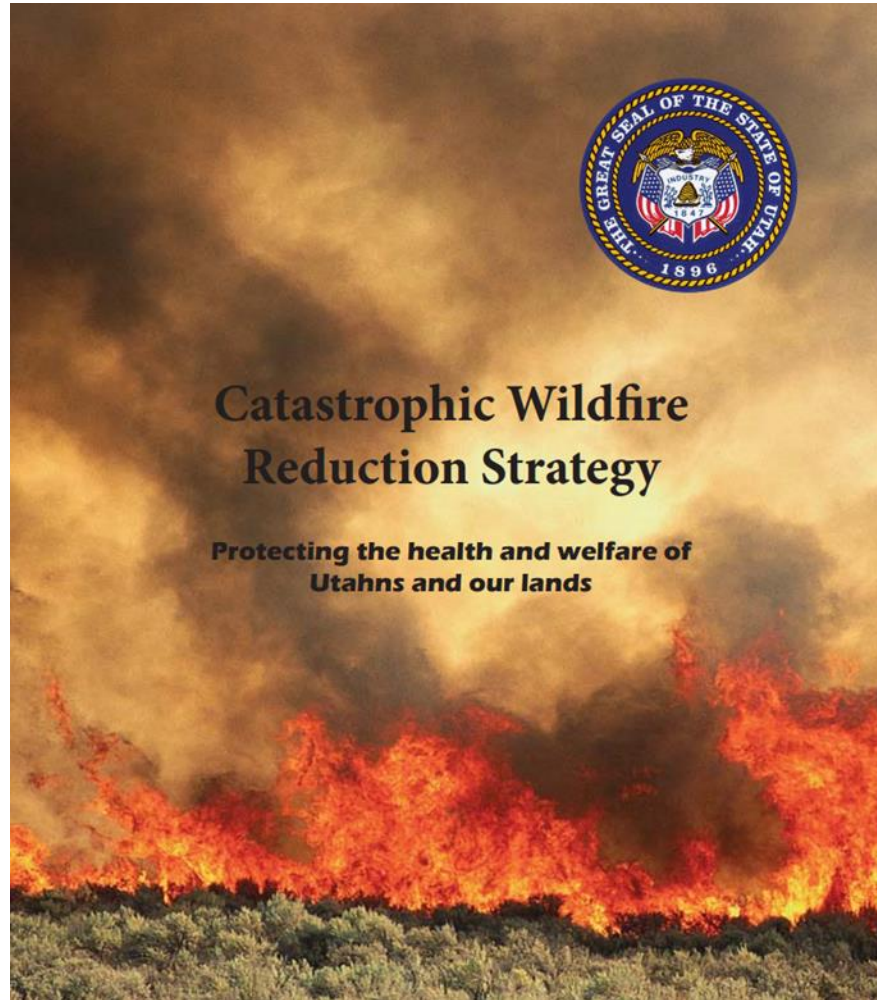
Catastrophic Wildfire Reduction Strategy

“...develop a comprehensive and systematic strategy to reduce the size, intensity and frequency of catastrophic wildland fire in Utah...”

Governor Herbert, following the 2012 fire season



Completed and presented to Governor Herbert December 2013



2014's SCR 7

“Concurrent Resolution on Comprehensive
Statewide Wildland Fire Prevention,
Preparedness, and Suppression Policy”

2015's S.B. 56

“Wildland Fire Policy”

Senator Evan Vickers & Representative Joel Briscoe

WILDLAND FIRE POLICY

2015 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Evan J. Vickers

House Sponsor: Joel K. Briscoe

LONG TITLE**General Description:**

This bill modifies the responsibilities of the Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- ▶ requires the director of the Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands to:
 - coordinate the development of a state-wide wildland fire policy; and
 - report to the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Interim

Committee on the director's recommendation for a state-wide wildland fire policy;

- ▶ describes the goals of a state-wide catastrophic wildfire reduction strategy; and
- ▶ states that the division may use funds to promote wildfire prevention, wildfire mitigation, and wildfire preparedness.

Why a Wildfire Policy Change?



Practical, financial & philosophical...

Statutory changes are needed to clarify the wildland fire management roles and responsibilities of counties and municipalities.

Utah Code § 11-7-1(1)

"The governing body of every incorporated municipality and the board of commissioners of every county shall provide adequate fire protection within their own territorial limits and shall cooperate with all contiguous counties, municipal corporations, private corporations, fire districts, or federal governmental agencies to maintain adequate fire protection within their territorial limits." (*counties & state maintain incorporated municipalities are responsible to provide for fire protection, including wildland fire suppression costs*)

Utah Code § 65A-8-202(4)

"The actual costs of suppression action taken by the division on privately owned lands shall be a charge against the county in which the lands lie, unless otherwise provided by cooperative agreement. " (*municipalities can argue they are not responsible for paying for wildland fire suppression costs*)

The current dilemma is that statute does not specifically discuss *wildland fire* responsibility and costs within *incorporated areas*.



Philosophical & Financial Shift

- Our current system is focused primarily on suppression
- So our wildfire future in Utah is certain:
 - Longer wildfire seasons with more wildfires, larger wildfires, and ever-more expensive, dangerous and deadly fires!



Philosophical & Financial Shift

We must create a system that emphasizes proactive wildfire risk reduction and, over time, reduces the costs of wildfire suppression and the exponentially increasing total costs of wildland fire.



Cornerstones of a Successful Policy Change

- Emphasize “pre-suppression”—prevention, preparedness & mitigation—not just suppression
- Everyone shares in paying the TOTAL costs of wildfires; therefore, we all should play a role in the reduction of wildfire risk & costs
- Mutually agreeable solution for both counties and cities/towns
- MUST LEAD TO LOWER *TOTAL* COSTS!



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